

# Molecular Genetic Characterization of Neuroendocrine Lung Cancer Cell Lines

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**Abstract.** *Small cell lung cancers express neuroendocrine (NE) cell features, while most non-SCLC tumors lack these features. We studied the cytogenetic and genetic alterations in cell lines derived from three unusual subtypes of lung cancer: including carcinoids, non-small cell lung cancers expressing NE properties (NSCLC-NE) and extrapulmonary small cell cancers (ExPuSC) and compared them with those of SCLC and NSCLC lines. Our studies included: cytogenetic studies, restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) analyses with 8 probes spanning commonly deleted loci on chromosomes 3p, 13q and 17p, retinoblastoma gene product (RB) expression, and mutations in the ras and p53 genes. We also summarize previously published data on in vitro chemosensitivity patterns and MDRI gene expression. Our studies demonstrate that all three of the NE cell subtypes have their own distinctive genotypes and phenotypes, each having some similarities and dissimilarities with SCLC and NSCLC.*

A number of clinical and biological features distinguished small cell lung cancers (SCLC) from non-small cell lung cancers (NSCLC)(1,2). Most SCLC tumors are initially chemosensitive, with response rates of approximately 80%, while most NSCLC tumors exhibit de novo resistance (3). SCLC is a neuroendocrine (NE) tumor, characterized by the presence of several neuroendocrine features including dense core granules and high levels of the key amine handling enzyme: L-dopa decarboxylase (2). Among the NSCLC tumors, only about 15% exhibit the same range of NE markers (NSCLC-NE) (2,4). Bronchial carcinoid is a relatively well differentiated, chemoresistant NE tumor. In addition, tumors morphologically similar to SCLC may arise from extrapulmonary locations,

and are termed extrapulmonary small cell cancer (ExPuSC) (5,6). Approximately half of the ExPuSC tumors express NE markers. Previous studies showed that their *in vivo* and *in vitro* chemosensitivity profiles are similar to that of SCLC (5,7,6).

The common human epithelial tumors are characterized by loss of genetic material, either sporadic or specific, at multiple sites. Loss of genetic material at specific sites presumably represents inactivation of known or putative tumor suppressor genes by mutation or deletion (8). Cytogenetic and restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) studies have localized certain sites on the human genome where genetic loss occurs frequently in SCLC, and less frequency in NSCLC (9-16). The sites involved in lung cancer included a large segment of chromosome 3p, 13q14 (Retinoblastoma gene locus), 17p13 (p53 gene locus). However, multiple other sites may also be involved (17-21).

We have demonstrated that cell lines derived from carcinoids, non-SCLC tumors expressing NE markers and ExPuSC carcinomas represent distinct phenotypes (22). In addition, our previous studies suggested that the genetic alterations accompanying ExPuSC may differ from those in SCLC (23). To further understand the relationship of these unusual NE tumors arising in pulmonary and extra-pulmonary sites to the more common lung cancers, we compared their cytogenetic and molecular findings with SCLC and NSCLC.

## Materials and Methods

**Cell lines.** Six NSCLC-NE, five bronchial carcinoids, and four ExPuSC cell lines were established, maintained and characterized in NCI-Navy Medical Oncology Branch, as described previously (1,24,22).

**Cytogenetic analysis.** Cell lines were cultured in RPMI-1640 supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum. Cytogenetic analyses were performed using a modified trypsin-Giemsa banding technique. The cell lines were harvested after incubation at 37 °C with colcemid (0.05 µg/ml) for 3-6 hours. The cells were then treated in a hypotonic solution consisting of 1% sodium citrate and 0.075 M potassium chloride (1:1) for 20 minutes and fixed in a mixture of methanol and glacial acetic acid (3:1). Air-dried chromosome preparations were made. After staining, metaphases were

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Table I. Frequencies of chromosomal abnormalities\* in lung cancer cell lines.

Tumortype	Chromosome 3p abnormalities (%)	Chromosome 13q abnormalities (%)	Chromosome 17p abnormalities (%)
SCLC (53)	48 (91%)	36 (68%)	34 (53%)
NSCLC (74)	60 (81%)	24 (32%)	62 (84%)
Carcinoid (4)	4 (100%)	3 (75%)	2 (50%)
NSCLC-NE (5)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)
ExPuSC (5)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)

Chromosomes 3p, 13q and 17p were scored as abnormal if they had deletions (interstitial, of the whole arm or of the whole chromosome), or if they were involved in translocations (including reciprocal and non-reciprocal translocations, inversions and isochromosomes). Increased numbers of normal appearing chromosomes were not scored as abnormal.

scored for modal chromosome number and aberrations, and G-banded karyotypes were prepared and scored according to the International System of Human Cytogenetic Nomenclature (25).

**RFLP analysis.** DNA extraction, digestion with appropriated restriction enzymes, Southern blotting, hybridization, and evaluation of the results were performed as described previously (10). We analyzed lung cancer cell lines with eight polymorphic DNA probes, homologous to loci on chromosome 3p, 13q, and 17p listed in Table I (26-28) (29-32).

**RB protein expression.** For immunoblotting, cellular protein lysates were prepared from 80% confluent cells in lysis buffer (1% Nonidet p-40/100 mM NaCl 2 mM EDTA/20 mM Tris, pH 8.0) containing phenylmethylsulfonyl (0.01%), aprotinin (1 µg/ml), leupeptin (1 µg/ml) NaF (5 mM), and sodium orthovanadate (1 mM) at 0°C for 30 minutes. Lysates were cleared by centrifugation at 15,000 x g for 15 minutes and stored at -80 °C. Protein concentration were determined by the Bio-Rad protein assay. Samples (100 µg) were analyzed by SDS/PAGE followed by immunoblotting (33). The mouse monoclonal antibody Mh-Rb-02 (PharMingen, San Diego, CA, USA) were used to detect RB protein. An 125I-labeled rabbit anti-mouse antibody (Amersham, Arlington, IL, USA) was used for detection.

**Detection of p53 gene mutations.** Point mutations in the p53 gene were detected as described previously (34). Briefly, 100 ng of genomic DNA was amplified in a volume of 10 µl containing 50 mM potassium chloride, 10 mM Tris-HCl (pH 8.3), 1.5 mM magnesium chloride, 0.01% (W/V) gelatin, 1.25 mM each of four dNTPs (Pharmacia), 0.05 µg of a pair of primers, 0.25 units of Taq DNA polymerase (Perkin Elmer Cetus, Norwalk, CT, USA) and 0.5 µl of [ $\alpha$ -<sup>32</sup>P]dCTP (300 Ci/mmol-l, 10 mCi mmol-l, Amersham, Arlington, IL, USA). The amplification reaction using a thermal cycler (Perkin-Elmer Cetus) consisted of 94 °C for 10 min for initial denaturation when using genomic DNA, followed by 35 cycles of 94 °C for 1 min, annealing for 2 min at 55 °C, and extension at 72 °C for 2 min.

Following PCR, 1 µl of PCR product was digested for 2 h with appropriate restriction enzymes. Two microliters of the enzyme digestion was transferred to a 96-well plate, mixed with loading buffer (95% formamide, 20 mM EDTA, 0.05% xylene cyanol, 0.05% bromophenol blue) and incubated in a 90 °C water bath for 5 min. After heating, the samples were immediately cooled on ice and 2 µl of each sample was loaded onto a 6% acrylamide gel containing 89 mM Tris-borate, 2 mM EDTA, pH 8.3 (1 x TBE). The gel was run at 25 W for 5 h in the cold room (4 °C) using 1 x TBE as running buffer. After electrophoresis, the gel was dried and exposed to Kodak X-omat AR film with an intensifying screen at -70 °C for 15 h.

Mutations detected by SSCP were confirmed by direct sequencing of

the PCR product was performed as described previously (34). Briefly, DNA segments containing the mutation which had been localized by SSCP analysis were amplified by PCR using an appropriate pair of primers. Using 1 µl of the product, second-round PCR was carried out with a pair of heminested primers. The product was purified by electrophoresis using low melting point agarose (BRL) followed by phenol-chloroform extraction. Direct sequencing of the double-stranded PCR product was carried out using the Sequenase kit version 2.0 (United States Biochemicals).

## Results

**Cytogenetic studies.** Chromosomal abnormalities (deletions, translocations and isochromosomes) are summarized in Table I and representative examples illustrated in Figure 1. Frequent abnormalities (>80%) of chromosome 3p were present in SCLC, NSCLC and carcinoid lines, occasionally present in ExPuSC lines (40%) and absent from NSCLC-NE lines (0%). At chromosome 13q locus relatively frequent abnormalities were found in SCLC and carcinoid lines (68-75%), and less frequently in NSCLC (32%), NSCLC-NE and ExPuSC (20%) lines. At chromosome 17p abnormalities were relatively frequent in SCLC, NSCLC and carcinoids (>50%), and absent in the other tumor types.

**RFLP analysis of chromosome 3, 13, 17.** General information about the markers is presented in Table II, and a summary of the RFLP data is presented in Table III. Since matching normal tissue for each cell line were not available, loss of heterozygosity could not be determined directly. Instead, we pooled the data from each chromosomal location and compared the frequencies of heterozygosity in the unusual NE tumor cell lines with SCLC and NSCLC cell lines and with the general population (Table IV). The p values were computed from the asymptotic normal approximation to the binomial distribution. The normal frequencies of heterozygosity for each locus were obtained from the literature and were statistically similar to the incidences present in the normal tissues of SCLC and NSCLC patients (Table III). A representative selection of the blots are illustrated in Figure 2.

The frequencies of heterozygosity for the carcinoid lines closely resembled those of SCLC lines. The frequencies for NSCLC-NE lines were not significantly different from those of NSCLC lines, but were significantly different from those of SCLC lines. The RFLP patterns of the ExPuSC lines were variable, and did not closely resemble those of SCLC or NSCLC lines. of particular interest, the frequencies of heterozygosity at 3p loci in ExPuSC lines were similar to the general population, and significantly higher than the other tumor types.

**Oncogene abnormalities in unusual NE cell lines.** Data regarding analyses of p53 gene mutations, RB protein expression and K-ras point mutations are summarized in Table V.

Mutations and other abnormalities of the p53 gene were common in all lung cancer cell lines, but were universal in SCLC and carcinoid lines, and less common (74-83%) in

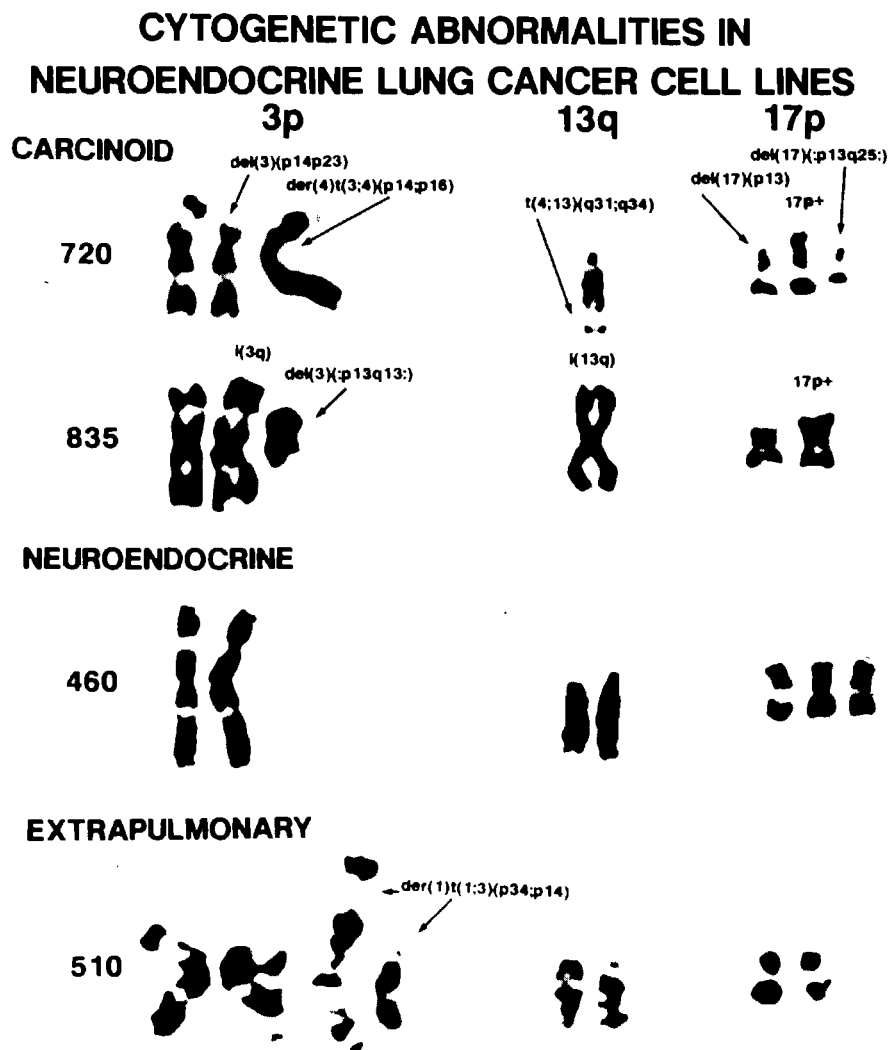


Figure 1. Cytogenetic abnormalities in neuroendocrine lung cancer cell lines. Representative karyotypes of chromosomes 3, 13, 17 for cell lines are depicted. The cell lines are: NCI-H-720 and NCI-H835 (atypical carcinoid), NCI-H-460 (NSCLC-NE), and NCI-H-510 (ExPaSC). Chromosomal abnormalities are indicated.

Table II. General information about probes used for RFLP studies.

Gene/locus	Chromosomal location	Probe name	Restriction enzyme	Allele sizes	Frequencies of heterozygosity*
YNZ 86.1	3p21	D3S30	MspI	2.0/1.9	0.5
DNF15S2	3p21	pH3H2	HindIII	2.3/2.0	0.48
EFD14S5.1	3p21	D3S32	TaqI	6.0/4.0	0.46
D3S2	3p14-21	p12-32	MspI	2.9/1.3	0.42
c-RAF-1	3p25	p627	BglI	4.0/3.3	0.5
D13S1	13q12-14	p7F12	MspI	4.3/3.4	0.64
D13S2	13q22	p9D11	MspI	15/10	0.44
YNZ22	17p13.3	D17S30	BamHI	VNIR	0.86
THH59	17q23-25.3	D17S4	PvuII	VNTR	0.71

\* In the general population

Table III. RFLP analyses of lung cancer cell lines.

Cell line type	YNZ86.1 3p21	DNF15S2 3p21	EFD145.1 3p21	D3S2 3p14-21	c-RAF-1 3p25	D13S1 13q12-14	D13S2 13q22	YNZ22 17p13.3	THH59 17q23-25.3
General population	0.52	0.48	0.46	0.42	0.5	0.64	0.44	0.86	0.71
SCLC	0.02	0	0.02	0.02	0	0	0.09	0	Not known
NSCLC	0.18	0.25	0.09	0/09	0.18	0.22	0.43	0.31	Not known
Carcinoid (n = 5)	0	0.5	0	0.5	0.4	0	0	0%	0.4
NSCLC-NE (n = 6)	0.17	0.5	0.17	0.17	0.5	0	0.5	0.33	0.17
ExPuSC n = 4)	0.5	0.75	0.25	0.5	0.75	0	0	0.5	0

Figures for the general population, SCLC and NSCLC are based on greater than 40 observations for each group.

Table IV. Comparison of frequencies of heterozygosity in neuroendocrine cell lines with general population and SCLC and NSCLC cell lines.

	General population	SCLC	NSCLC
Chromosome 3p			
Carcinoid	p1 < 0.0001	NS	p2 = 0.03
NSCLC-NE	p1 = 0.045	p2 < 0.0001	p2 = 0.02
ExPuSc	NS	p2 < 0.0001	p2 < 0.0001
Chromosome 13q			
Carcinoid	p1 = 0.003	NS	p2 = 0.024
NSCLC-NE	p1 = 0.02	p2 = 0.0004	NS
ExPuSc	p1 = 0.001	NS	p2 = 0.046
Chromosome 17p			
Carcinoid	p1 < 0.0001	p2 = 1.0	NS
NSCLC-NE	p1 = 0.00045	p2 < 0.0001	NS
ExPuSc	p1 = 0.097	p2 < 0.0001	NS

NSCLC, NSCLC-NE and ExPuSC lines.

Abnormal patterns of RB protein expression as determined by Western blotting were frequent in SCLC and ExPuSC lines (88% and 80% respectively), but occurred at much lower frequencies in NSCLC, NSCLC-NE and carcinoid lines (14-17%).

Point mutations of the K-ras gene were absent in SCLC and carcinoid lines. The frequencies in NSCLC and carcinoid lines were similar (32% and 25% respectively) (Table V). The frequency in NSCLC-NE lines was high (67%).

## Discussion

Carcinoid, NSCLC-NE and ExPuSC tumors express the same

Table V. Frequencies of oncogene abnormalities\* in lung cancer cell lines.

Tumor type (n)	p53 gene*	rb gene*	K-ras*
SCLC	33/33 (100%)	66/75 (88%)	0/37 (0%)
NSCLC	57/77 (74%)	11/74 (14%)	18/56 (32%)
Carcinoid	4/4 (100%)	1/6 (17%)	1/4 (25%)
NSCLC-NE	5/6 (83%)	1/6 (17%)	4/6 (67%)
ExPuSC	4/5 (80%)	4/5 (80%)	0/5 (0%)

\* Number abnormal/number tested (%). For p53 gene, abnormal patterns detected by SSCP analysis of exons 5-8. Most abnormal patterns were confirmed by sequencing. For rb gene, expression of RB protein by Western blotting. Abnormal patterns were identified as described in Methods. For K-ras gene, base substitutions in codons 12, 13, or 61, as determined by designed RFLP method, and confirmed by direct sequencing.

pattern of NE cell differentiation as SCLC. However, it is not known whether these tumors share the same genetic alterations, although retention of chromosome 3p in ExPuSC has previously been demonstrated by molecular and cytogenetic studies (23), and RB protein patterns for some of the cell lines have been recently published (35). The studies reported herein were performed in an effort to understand the inter-relationships and pathogenesis of these unusual NE tumors. We have reported the establishment of cell lines from the three types of NE tumors, and had characterized their NE cell features, in vitro chemosensitivity profiles and MDRI gene expression patterns (2,36,22). Because corresponding non-malignant tissues were not available from these cases, we pooled the RFLP data from each chromosomal location and compared the frequencies of heterozygosity in the unusual NE tumor cell lines with SCLC and NSCLC cell lines and with the general population. We have summarized the data presented in this report, along with our previously published data on MDRI gene RNA

## RFLP ANALYSIS OF NEUROENDOCRINE CELL LINES

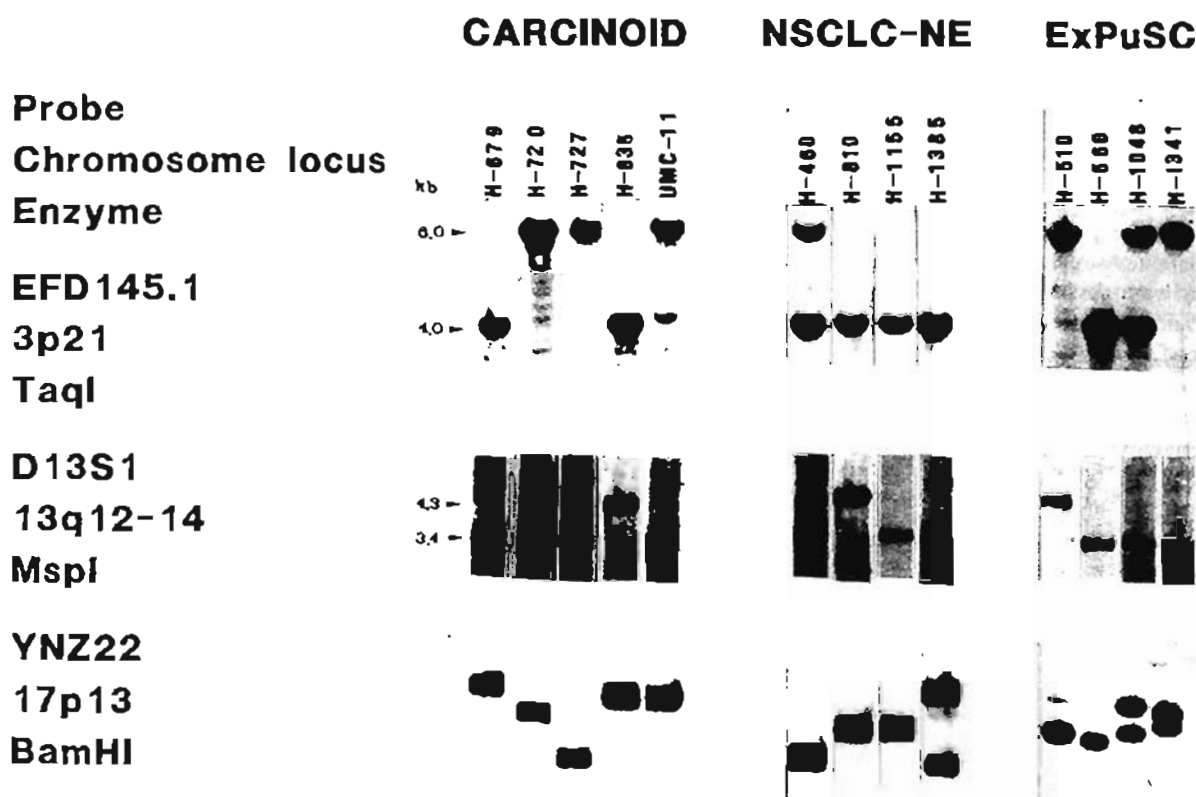


Figure 2. Restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) analysis of neuroendocrine lung cancer cell lines. Representative Southern blot hybridization patterns for 3 different polymorphic chromosomal loci are shown. EFD145.1 (3p21, TaqI), D13S1 (13q12-14, MspI), YNZ22 (17p13, BamHI) represent the probes, corresponding chromosomal locations and restriction enzymes used. Numbers to the left of autoradiographs indicated the molecular size of the two polymorphic alleles in kilobases. YNZ22 is a VNTR (variable number of tandem repeats) marker on chromosome 17p.

expression and in vitro chemosensitivity (Table 6). It is obvious from these patterns, that these three NE tumor types represent distinct molecular entities, and differ from SCLC and NSCLC, as well as from each other.

Cytogenetic abnormalities and loss of genetic material at multiple loci on chromosome 3p are common in all forms of lung cancer (37). Presumably this region is the site of several (at least three) growth regulatory (tumor suppressor) genes. Peripheral lymphocytes of smokers demonstrate elevated expression of fragile sites at the cancer breakpoints including 3p14.2 (38). While these findings suggest that cigarette smoke may play a role in the loss of genetic material at this site, other mechanisms must exist, as 3p deletions are common in certain tumors not strongly associated with smoking, including breast and renal carcinomas (39,40). Chromosome 3p deletions are almost universal in SCLC and carcinoids, and frequent in NSCLC and NSCLC-NE. However, they occur only occasionally in ExPuSC. These differences may reflect the role of tobacco smoke and other airborne carcinogens in the patho-

genesis of lung cancers. ExPuSC cancers arise at many sites throughout the body (other than the lungs), and exposure to tobacco smoke is unlikely to play a role in the pathogenesis of most of them.

Abnormalities of RB protein expression were common in SCLC and ExPuSC, and considerably less frequent in other forms of lung cancer. To some extent, these findings were reflected by the cytogenetic studies and the incidences of heterozygosity at chromosome 13q (the site of the *rb* gene). However, for carcinoids, there were considerable discrepancies in the results of these three assays. As previously mentioned, lack of DNA from corresponding normal tissues of the unusual NE cell lines made their interpretation less reliable.

Mutations of the *p53* gene (located at 17p13) were common in all types of lung cancers, although they were universal in SCLC and carcinoids. However, the incidences of cytogenetic abnormalities and were lower and more variable.

The incidences of *K-ras* mutations in the lung cancer lines showed interesting differences. To date, *ras* mutations have

Table VI. Summary of properties of lung cancer cell lines.

Tumor type	Loss 3p	Loss 13q	Loss 17p	p53 mutations	Abnormal RB expression	ras gene mutations	MDR1 gene expression	Relative chemosensitivity
SCLC	Very common	Common	Common	Almost always	Very common	Never	Low	Very sensitive
NSCLC	Common	Occasional	Common	Common	Occasional	Occasional	Low	Resistant
Carcinoid	Very common	Very common	Occasional	Almost always	Occasional	Occasional	Relatively high	Very resistant
NSCLC-NE	Occasional	Occasional	Occasional	Very common	Occasional	Common	Relatively high	Very sensitive
ExPuSC	Occasional	Occasional	Occasional	Very common	Very common	Never	Low	Sensitive

not been demonstrated in any SCLC tumor or cell line (41,42), and they were absent in ExPuSC lines. A subset of NSCLC tumors and lines (approximately 30%), especially adenocarcinomas and large cell carcinomas, have mutations (41,42). Carcinoid cell lines had a similar incidence (25%). However, two larger series, which analyzed fresh tumor samples, failed to find ras mutations in carcinoids and large cell neuroendocrine carcinomas (43,44). Of considerable interest, ras mutations were found in 4/6 (67%) of NSCLC-NE lines, all of which were derived from large cell or adenocarcinomas.

Our previously reported findings regarding MDR1 gene expression and chemosensitivity patterns of the various types of lung cancer cell lines are summarized in Table IV. Most SCLC and NSCLC lines (even those established from patients who had previously received chemotherapy) express low or undetectable levels of MDR1 (36). However, the use of a highly sensitive PCR-based quantitative assay demonstrated low expression levels in most cell lines (45). Thus both chemosensitive SCLC, and chemoresistant NSCLC expressed equally low levels. The ExPuSC (varying chemosensitivities) expressed low levels, while the highly chemoresistant carcinoids expressed. NSCLC-NE lines demonstrated the biggest discrepancy - they were highly chemosensitive, but expressed relatively high levels of MDR1. Thus, there was no correlation between chemosensitivity patterns and MDR1 expression. In addition, these patterns help confirm the unique phenotype of the five subtypes of lung cancer that we investigated.

In summary, despite the similarity of biological features in neuroendocrine lung cancer cell lines, our studies demonstrate that all three of the NE cell subtypes have their own distinctive genotypes and phenotypes, each having some similarities and dissimilarities with SCLC and NSCLC.

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